

Christmas 2017
12/25/17

The Gospel passage you just heard is the real story of the nativity. You see, as far as I'm concerned, the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke are nice stories but John tells it like it is; he doesn't prettify the idea, to use the words of Brennan Manning. John reminds us that Jesus, because He was and is God, was part of creation. When God spoke, things happened. And when God decided to become man, he left eternity and joined us in time. He came to us and for us for God's sake. Better yet, He came not for God's sake but for our sake. And the world has not been the same since.

In John's version of the nativity story, there is no mention of mangers or angels or shepherds. John DOES say that Jesus was in the beginning, that He was the Word, capital "W", that He was not only with God, He was God. John says what came to be through Him was life, the light of the human race, a light shining in darkness.

John says that "the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us, and we saw His glory." Jesus is therefore the visible image of the invisible God, the perfection of God's intentions for the universe, and the greatest gift we could possibly receive.

In his meditation book, *Grace for the Moment*, Max Lucado speaks of God's greatest gifts this way: Why did He do it? A shack would have sufficed, but He gave us a mansion. Did He have to give the birds a song and the mountains a peak? Was He required to put stripes on the zebra and the hump on the camel? Why wrap creation in such splendor? Why go to so much trouble to give such gifts?

If you think about it, we do the same. We stalk the malls and walk the aisles, looking for the extra special gift for the extra special person. Why? So the heart will stop, so the jaw will drop. We do it to hear the words of disbelief: "You did this for me?"

That's why we do it. And that is why God did it. Next time a sunrise steals your breath away or a meadow of flowers leaves you speechless, remain that way. Say nothing and listen as heaven whispers, "Do you like it? I did it just for you."

A few years ago, I received an email from a dear friend and in the email was a quote from author William Sloane Coffin. "Of God's love we can say two things: it is poured out universally for everyone from the Pope to the loneliest wino on the planet. And secondly, God's love doesn't seek value, it creates value. It is not because we have value that we are loved, but because we are loved that we have value. Our value is a gift, not an achievement."

And so, on this Christmas night/day, we say, "You did this just for us. Thank you, God, for the gifts of the birds and the mountains and the zebras and the camels and for the flowers and sunsets. But most especially, thank you for the extra special gift of your Son. Which proves that, to you, each of us is extra special, too."